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1 DECEMBER 2022



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Topic: Defence

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India-U.S. exercise near LAC irks China

Ananth Krishnan

BEIJING

China on Wednesday said it had expressed its concern to India over the joint India-U.S. military exercise, *Yudh Abhyas*, being conducted in Uttarakhand, about 100 km from the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

“The joint military exercise between India and the

U.S. close to the LAC at the China-India border violates the spirit of the agreements signed between India and China in 1993 and 1996. It does not serve the mutual trust between India and China,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian told a media briefing in Beijing.

CHINA WARNS U.S.

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Topic:Legislature

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FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 1, 1972

Anti-defection Bill not for the current session

New Delhi, Nov. 30: It is learnt that the Government will not be able to introduce during the current session of Parliament the proposed Bill to curb defections. It has been decided to further study the implications of the Anti-Defection Bill which was drawn up some time ago on the basis of certain discussions the Government had with leaders of the Opposition on the subject. Whether at all such a Bill would achieve the purpose is being looked into. Some basic rethinking is being done as to whether the more appropriate course would be for the political parties themselves to follow a code of conduct and impose self-regulating measures to stop defections. But the main question is whether a proposal to disqualify defectors from continuing as members of the legislature would stand the test in courts of law. Article 105 of the Constitution lays down the powers, privileges and immunities of members of Parliament while Article 194 refers to corresponding privileges of members of State Assemblies. In view of this, the question has arisen whether any restriction on a member's right to vote, which is what the Anti-Defection Bill will ultimately mean, will be constitutional. It is also clearly stated that the privileges of members of Parliament until defined by Parliament will continue to be the same as those of the members of the House of the Commons. In effect, any Anti-Defection Bill which abridges the right of the members to vote as they like will offend these provisions of the Constitution. Therefore, the Union Cabinet is believed to have once again decided to remit the matter to the Law Ministry for a further examination so that if a constitutional amendment is necessary, it could be taken up.

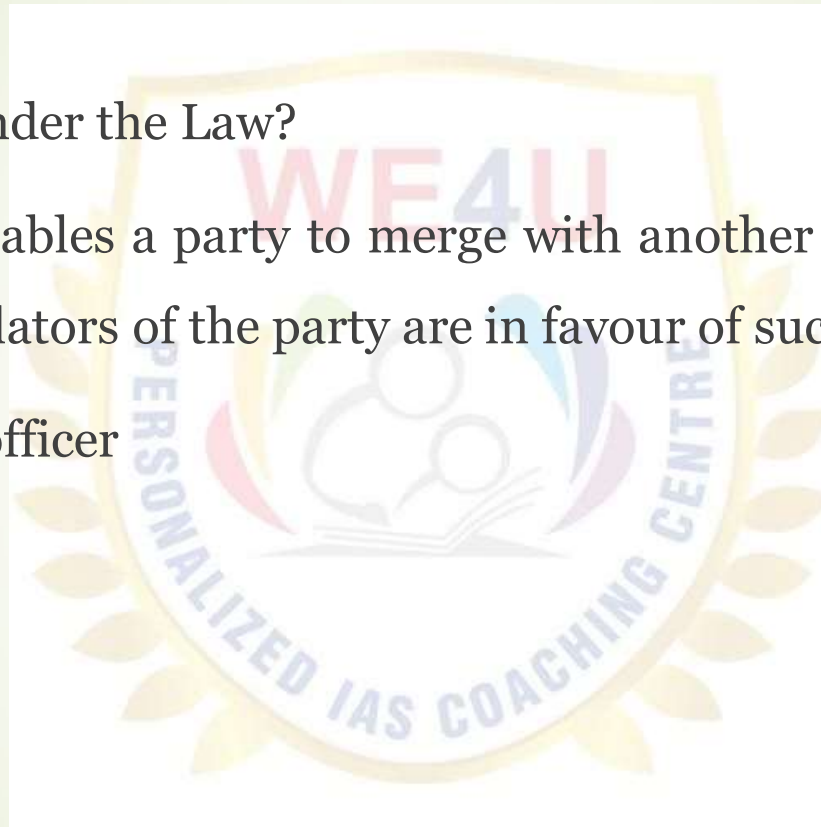
Antidefection

- The anti-defection law was introduced in 1985, through the 52nd Amendment Act of 1985.
- It was inserted in the Tenth Schedule of the Indian Constitution and is popularly known as Anti Defection Act.
- The goal was to prevent the legislators from changing their political affiliations during their tenure in office.

- It applies to both the Parliament and the state assemblies.
- The presiding officer has the authority to disqualify a member on proven grounds of defection.
- Grounds of Defection
 - 1. Voluntarily giving up his membership
 - 2. Violation of Instructions
 - 3. Independent Members
 - 4. Nominated Members

Exceptions under the Law?

- ▶ The law enables a party to merge with another party if at least two-thirds of the legislators of the party are in favour of such a merger.
- ▶ Presiding officer



Are ransomware attacks increasing in India?

What happened at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences? How does a ransomware infect a computer? How many organisations in India are working toward cyber-crime responses and prevention?

Devesh K. Pandey
Arnabjit Sur

The story so far:

On November 23, e-services at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) were crippled by what is being suspected to be a ransomware attack. The Delhi Police's Intelligence Fusion & Strategic Operations have registered a case and launched investigations to identify the perpetrators, while cyber security experts are employing software tools for data recovery. They have been able to retrieve a significant number of files. However, pending sanitisation of the entire network and its nodes, all hospital services are currently being executed manually. AIIMS has a Local Area Network comprising more than 6,500 computers supporting the institute, its hospital, centres and

other departments. While a probe is underway to determine if essential safety protocols were in place, measures are being taken to thwart any such attack in the future.

What is ransomware?

Ransomware is a type of malicious software, used by cyber criminals, to infect a computer system by blocking access to the stored data by encrypting the files. A ransom is then demanded from the owner in exchange for the decryption key.

While it is not yet clear as to how exactly the AIIMS computer systems were targeted, the malware may usually be injected remotely by tricking the user into downloading it upon clicking an ostensibly safe web link sent via email or other means, including hacking. It can spread throughout the network by

exploiting existing vulnerabilities. Ransomware attacks can also be accompanied by theft of sensitive data for other sinister motives.

How serious are ransomware attacks?

Preliminary findings by cyber experts have indicated that at least five of the AIIMS' servers that hosted data related to more than three crore patients were compromised. In India, several cases of ransomware attacks targeting commercial and critical infrastructure have been reported in the recent past. In May, Spicejet had faced such a threat, while Public Sector Undertaking Oil India was targeted on April 10. Cybersecurity firm Trellix, in its third-quarter global report, has identified 25 major ransoms in circulation. According to the Interpol's first-ever Global Crime Trend report presented at its 90th General Assembly

meeting in Delhi this October, ransomware was the second highest-ranking threat after money laundering, at 66%. It is also expected to increase the most (72%).

Which agencies in India deal with cyber-attacks?

Set up in 2004, the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) is the national nodal agency that collects, analyses and circulates inputs on cyber-attacks; issues guidelines, advisories for preventive measures, forecasts and issues alerts; and takes measures to handle any significant cyber security event. It also imparts training to computer system managers. The National Cyber Security Coordinator, under the National Security Council Secretariat, coordinates with different agencies at the national level on cybersecurity issues, while the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre has been set up for the protection of national critical information infrastructure. According to the government, the Cyber Swachhta Kendra (Botnet Cleaning and Malware Analysis Centre) has been launched for detection of malicious software programmes and to provide free tools to remove the same, while the National Cyber Coordination Centre works on creating awareness about existing and potential threats.

THE GIST

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Topic:

- CERT-In was established in 2004 as a functional organization of the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology**.
- **Functions:** The Information Technology (Amendment) Act 2008 designated CERT-In to serve as the national agency to perform the following functions in the area of cyber security:
 - Collection, analysis and dissemination of information on cyber incidents.
 - Forecast and alerts of cyber security incidents
 - Emergency measures for handling cyber security incidents
 - Coordination of cyber incident response activities.
 - Issue guidelines, advisories, vulnerability notes and whitepapers relating to information
 - security practices, procedures, prevention, response and reporting of cyber incidents.
 - Such other functions relating to cyber security as may be prescribed.

Topic:

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SC worried over effect of GM crops on livelihood of women farm labourers

Petitions challenge environmental nod given to GM mustard; petitioner says widespread use of herbicide-tolerant crops will encourage farmers to spray chemical weed-killers, leaving large amounts of toxic chemical residue on the crops

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday expressed concern about the plight of thousands of women agricultural labourers in rural areas traditionally engaged in de-weeding as they would be part of the human cost if the government permitted the commercial cultivation of herbicide-tolerant crops such as GM mustard.

"In rural areas, women are experts in removing weeds. They are a part of the labour force in agriculture in India. It brings them employment... You know it is because women started agriculture that humankind stopped being nomads and we saw the sprouting of civilisations," Justice B.V. Nagarathna observed orally while hearing challenges against the environmental clearance given to genetically modified mustard by the Centre.



Crucial factor: Women working on a mustard field in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh. CH. VIJAYA BHASKAR

Justice Dinesh Maheshwari, the lead judge on the Bench, agreed that women were an integral part of the Indian agricultural landscape from paddy fields to tea estates, across the country.

"They work in knee-deep water in the fields, bending the whole day and working," Justice Nagarathna said.

Senior advocate Sanjay Parikh, for a petitioner, said the widespread use of herbicide-tolerant crops would encourage farmers to spray chemical weed-

killers, leaving toxic chemical residue in large amounts on the crops.

'Not meant for India'

"The Supreme Court's own Technical Expert Committee [TEC] had said that these GM crops were not meant for agriculture in the Indian context. They may be suitable in the western context where there are large farms, but not here," Mr. Parikh argued.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, for activist Aruna Rodrigues, submitted that

India had 5,477 varieties of mustard, which would be at risk. He argued that the regulatory system under the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), which cleared the environmental release of Dhara Mustard Hybrid-II (DMH-II), a genetically engineered variant of mustard, was "horrendous" and riddled with conflict of interest.

Mr. Bhushan said the Department of Biotechnology had funded DMH II and then was part of the regulatory mechanism. The environmental release of the hybrid mustard variety was cleared despite warnings from the parliamentary committee and the Supreme Court's Technical Expert Committee report calling for its ban. Besides, the government had not placed the biosafety dossier on the GM crop in the public domain.

He said the Supreme Court-appointed member

of the GEAC, Pushpa M. Bhargava, had said the commercial cultivation of GM mustard would open the door wide, for multinational corporations.

He said GM mustard, if approved for commercial cultivation, would be the first genetically modified food crop available to Indian farmers. He recalled how Bt Brinjal was withdrawn by the government years ago after the regulatory system was found riddled with inconsistencies.

"Hybrid crops should not be released in the open fields and allowed to contaminate other crops... It would trigger a chain reaction which would be irreversible," he said.

Mr. Bhushan said the testing of the GM crop was "completely flawed". There were no labs capable of doing bio-safety tests.

The Attorney-General will argue on behalf of the government on Thursday.

Topic:

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SC seeks Centre's response on evolving a programme to protect Great Indian Bustard

The Great Indian Bustard (GIB), the State bird of Rajasthan, is considered India's most critically endangered bird.

It is considered the flagship grassland species, representing the health of the grassland ecology.

Its population is confined mostly to Rajasthan and Gujarat. Small populations occur in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

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- The bird is under constant threats due to collision/electrocution with power transmission lines, hunting (still prevalent in Pakistan), habitat loss and alteration as a result of widespread agricultural expansion, etc.
- International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List: Critically Endangered
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES): Appendix 1
- Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule 1

THANK YOU

